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Haig Emphasizes Importance of National Strength

Actions Defended In Nixon Years

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Alexander M. Haig Jr., Ronald Reagan's choice for secretary of state, yesterday stoutly defended his performance in the service of another president, Richard M. Nixon, while Democratic senators for the first time called openly for authority to subpoena documents and tapes relating to Haig's White House years.

Nixon, Haig told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on the opening day of his confirmation hearings, "was entitled to the presumption of innocence until proven otherwise." As for his own actions during those years, Haig said he "worked hard within the boundaries of the law and the advice of lawyers to support him."

Anticipating that the Democratic Senate minority would try and use his controversial role in the Nixon White House as a way to question his suitability for the nation's top diplomatic post, Haig came to the packed hearing room prepared to confront his critics head-on.

He produced a nine-page summary of what he called "the facts" on all the controversial items raised by the Democrats, including his roles in Nixon's pardon, wiretapping of officials and reporters, and the bombing of Cambodia. He also told the committee that he, personally, had no objection to any subpoena and that he did not have anything to hide.

The former four-star general and commander of NATO troops won considerable praise from both Democrats and Republicans during the all-day session for the overall talents he

Nevertheless, a number of Democrats made clear that their concerns were not limited to specific acts that may or may not be recorded on some secret tape or stored in a locked file. Rather, a number of them focused on Haig's attitudes toward power, the presidency and the Constitution and questioned how those views, combined with his many years of military service, would influence his actions as secretary of state.

Before Haig said a word at yesterday's session, Sen. Claiborne Pell (D-R.I.), the ranking minority member on the 17-person panel, told the audience that "in the 16 years I have served on this committee, I do not recall a nomination that has come before us that has caused the concern and worry in the Senate that this one has."

Pell, in his opening statement, also quickly brought into focus the committee's sharp partisan split when he asked it to approve the issuance of subpoenas for specific records "to help judge what kind of a secretary of state" Haig would make. Pell and other Democrats argued that clearing the air would be to everybody's benefit, including Haig's, and that the symbolism of such a move would convey a true spirit of openness.

The committee chairman, Republican Sen. Charles Percy of Illinois, and the Senate majority leader, Sen. Howard H. Baker Jr. of Tennessee, warned, however, that such a move would probably lead nowhere, that Nixon would probably take legal action to stop it, and that it would delay confirming Haig, possibly until after the inauguration, which, they said, would be dangerous considering international troubles.

At the end of the witness table where Haig sat was a large pile of books and documents, apparently meant to be used by Republicans in

his support, if necessary. Percy referred to how much material was already available and, later in the hearing, Sen. Joseph R. Biden Jr. (D-Del.) pointed to the stack and noted its "symbolism," an allusion to Nixon's nationally televised defense of Watergate in which he surrounded himself with stacks of books containing transcripts from the White House tapes.

Percy temporarily resolved the tapes and documents dispute by asking committee counsels from both parties to meet and report by this morning on what courses seem practical to obtain additional documents that are not restricted by existing laws. Percy said he would go along with a request for subpoena power "if necessary."

In his prepared statement, Haig said the decision to use wiretaps to stop news leaks was the president's, not his, and that, when asked who had access to various information, he supplied names but "never decided on which individuals were to be tapped."

Haig also claimed that "at no time did I ever suggest in any way an agreement or deal that Mr. Nixon would resign in exchange for a pardon from Mr. Ford."

He also sought to put to rest assertions that one tape of a conversation between him and Nixon on June 4, 1973, suggests that he suggested to Nixon that the president "should dissemble or pretend not to recall something" as part of his Watergate defense. Haig says he cannot recall all of the conversation, and that the tape is largely "unintelligible," but that he thinks he was advising Nixon that, for his own sake, he should continue listening to the tapes since Nixon could not independently recall what had been said on various occasions.

Haig claimed that "although Watergate was obviously important" during his 17 months as White House chief of my: